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To Keep the Secrets

THE CONSPIRATORIAL theory of history, as some analyst of it has noted, tells a lot more about those who espouse it than it does about history itself.

The observation is relevant to the attempt of U.S. Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, to get his committee a share in overseeing the Central Intelligence Agency.

For Senator Fulbright's basic premise for his proposal is that the CIA makes or takes over foreign policy in a conspiratorial circumvention of both the State Department and the Senator's committee.

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THE EFFORT has Fulbright locked in combat with a Senate giant, Georgia's Richard B. Russell, chairman of the Armed Services Committee which has a subcommittee responsible for CIA oversight.

Senator Russell calls Senator Fulbright's charges about CIA foreign policy activities "sheer poppycock" containing "not a scintilla of truth" or "a single concrete case" in support. "There is no justification whatever for any other committee to muscle in on the jurisdiction of the Armed Services Committee so far as the CIA is concerned," Russell asserted on the Senate floor this week, declaring he had to speak out because the CIA itself by its nature "is compelled to stand mute."

The issue here is not so simple a matter as jealousy between two powerful Senators. The problem, as Senator Russell sees it, is that "these erroneous charges . . . calculated to deceive members of Congress . . . affect the sources available to the CIA, which are easily disturbed." Increased public discussion, or leaks through an enlarged Congressional panel, "might cause them to close up like clams

lives."

To Senator Ernest Gruening of Alaska, who charged that the failure at the Bay of Pigs showed that the CIA does make foreign policy, Senator Russell replied, "What you are saying is that the CIA sold the President a bill of goods. But the CIA couldn't have moved one foot without the approval of the President."

The Bay of Pigs is a good case in point against Senator Fulbright's involvement in CIA supervision. For the failure there was based on monumental misinformation — of which the CIA was the principal collector and purveyor.

Intelligence information is the CIA's purpose; misinformation is behind the worst of its mistakes. The kind of thing which Senator Russell fears from expanding the committee (his own group has a noteworthy reputation for being leakproof, he says), by reducing the CIA's worldwide sources would thereby compound the possibility of misinformation.

For we cannot help but suspect that Senator Fulbright's real interest in becoming involved in supervision of the CIA is to make capital of its activities as best he can in support of his own views on foreign policy.

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SENATOR Fulbright, a former college president and Rhodes scholar, fancies himself a reasonable man. So doing, he cannot see why other reasonable men fail to share his views — on Vietnam, for instance. Thus frustrated, he thrashes about for a reason and, like so many others who are frustrated because they cannot impose their views on others, arrives at the conspiratorial theory. Others darkly suspect other conspirators; the Senator darkly suspects the CIA.

Spying, which is the CIA's mission, is at best a "dirty" business, but as necessary to the national security as secrecy is to espionage. Somehow, we can't help feeling with Senator Russell that its secrets are better kept where they are kept by J. William Fulbright.